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ABSTRACT

American schools use history textbooks that distort history by slighting the influence of religion on customs and institutions. The textbooks used in Montgomery County, Maryland--a highly regarded district--may be considered a sample of those used in the nation's best schools. Yet among these texts there is a remarkable consensus that, after 1700, Christianity had no historical presence in America; even within the colonial period, the treatment of Christianity is incomplete, incompetent, and patronizing, imparting to students contempt for the past rather than an understanding of it. Several examples illustrate factual errors that can be attributed simply to the textbook author's ignorance. The document contends, however, that fallacies, such as oversimplification and anachronism, occur because the authors of history texts hold their readers' intellects in contempt. Presenting historical figures and events as mere symbols of ideas, they create a caricature of history to advance the thesis that America was settled as a refuge from religion. By disregarding Christianity in early America, the texts disregard the world view that informed a society, and thus fail to teach history. Because they make no attempt to transcend their authors' opinions, and especially because they neglect historical fact, these books must be condemned. (MCG)

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POLICY STUDIES IN EDUCATION

History, Pseudo-History, Anti-History:

How Public-School Textbooks Treat Religion

by Robert Bryan

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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1. Not all subjects are equal: there are certain basic skills which students should not be free to avoid. These include competence at reading, writing and mathematics, and acquaintance with the worlds of literature, art and music, history, politics, and the natural sciences.

2. Real learning is hard work: homework, tests, and grading should be restored to their rightful places.

3. A sound disciplinary climate, with swift and sure penalties for misbehavior, is indispensable for academic effectiveness.

4. School faculties need more liberal-arts graduates with some measure of real learning, and fewer alumni of the warehouses for the semi-competent called "teacher colleges."

5. Schools should pay more attention to excellence than to equality. The schools which contribute most to the cause of equality are precisely those which concentrate on excellence.

6. Schools need leaders, not mere functionaries. Vigorous, responsible leadership is incompatible with the crazy-quilt of overlapping State and Federal agencies which have acquired the power to regulate, limit, and reverse local decisions.

7. Monopolies hurt both consumers and producers, and violate the basic principles of a pluralistic society. Vouchers, tax credits, and similar mechanisms for broadening parental choice are essential to education reform.

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HISTORY, PSEUDO-HISTORY, ANTI-HISTORY: HOW PUBLIC-SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS TREAT RELIGION

by Robert Bryan

"Miss Batterson retorted. . .'There is no book that all my students have read.' Dr. Rosenbaum knew that it is in sentences like this, and not in the pages of Spengler, that one has brought home to one the twilight of the West. He gave a brotherly cough and agreed: "Ja, dey haf de sense dey vere born vidt.'"

--Randall Jarrell, Pictures from an Institution

No doubt it is still true--if not even more true--that there is no book that all of anyone's students have read. Probably nowadays, the sentence could be transposed, so that "there is only one book that most of my students have read"--the textbook. Textbooks are the only books which American students necessarily confront, and because of that they acquire a peculiar authority. This authority makes textbooks crucial to anyone who is concerned about American education. The textbook stands alone, unsupported and uncontested; it rises like a single mountain peak, an inescapable focus of attention.

This is especially true of history. Since the infinite quantity of past facts, not all of equal importance, is available to the historian, his task is to select the facts germane to his purpose and arrange them in such a way as best to exhibit it. The purpose must be the illumination of the past as he understands it. If a historian believes in anything, from dialectical materialism to the lost continent of Mu, that belief is likely to affect his work. But whatever his beliefs, he cannot escape the scholar's duty to seek the truth about the past "wie es eigentlich gewesen ist"--as it really was--not as he would like it to have been.

What this means is that all history, including textbooks, is included in the realm of that critical scholarship which is one of the greatest glories of the Western tradition of the liberal arts. Moreover, history represents the sole introduction to scholarship which the secondary student necessarily receives, his only passport to that realm. The other requirements which he is expected to fulfill do give him the tools for his own scholarship, but only later in his academic career. In the study of history, he sees--or ought to see--the result of scholarship. Even in the study of literature, a high school student usually encounters only the works themselves, without the critical tradition. The study of history, however, is inseparable from an encounter with historical scholarship and historical reasoning. For this sweet and noble reason the study of history is of the foremost importance in secondary education.

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One of the most revealing features of any historical narrative is its treatment of religion. Religion, whatever it happens to be, is always fundamental to the institutions of society; therefore, its influence is always pervasive. The customs and institutions of any society will be shaped by its members' religion--their fundamental beliefs about the nature of the world they live in and their duty towards it. Both for continuity and for historical change, it is necessary to understand these beliefs; a work is not historical, but anachronistic if it fails to place the past in the context of its fundamental beliefs.

A great number of textbooks is published in the United States annually. The task of assessing all of them is impossible. It is necessary to choose a sample. In order to get a fair, but manageable sample, to cut a core for assay out of the center of the lode, I have decided to choose one school district and to examine its approved texts. For this purpose, I have chosen Montgomery County, Maryland. This choice is not meant to imply any adverse judgment of Montgomery County--rather the reverse. In making a selection of textbooks for review, I have suspended judgment. I have let the Montgomery County Board of Education make the judgment for me. Except for the force of circumstance, which made Montgomery County easily available to me, there would have been no reason to choose it over Montgomery County, Mississippi, or Montgomery County, North Carolina, apart from the esteem it enjoys in professional circles.

Montgomery County, Maryland, has a school system which stands high in reputation. It seems fair to judge the textbooks it approves on the basis of that reputation. If Montgomery County can be cited as an example for other public school systems, then its textbooks can be assumed to be among the best available. If they are adequate, we can be sure that at least the best public schools in the United States (best, once again, according to standing in the profession) have access to reliable history texts; but if not, then we are entitled to assume that the public schools use very few adequate history textbooks.

The Montgomery County Board of Education issues a program of studies for each of the various divisions of secondary education. History is not one of the separate departments; it is included in social studies, along with the study of national and local governments, cultural anthropology, sociology, psychology, comparative religion and contemporary social problems. Each separate program of studies is prefaced by the Board's decretal of February 12, 1973, "The Goals of Education," in which the purposes to be fulfilled by all the programs are set out. Here, under the heading "The Individual and Society," is included the goal of attaining a "familiarity with the legal, moral, ethical and cultural heritage of his (/her) and other societies." This aim seems a fair premise for the study of history.

Turning to the special program for social studies, however, we find that the fundamental requirement--the least requirement which <u>all</u> students are bound to satisfy--includes four courses, one of which must involve the study of contemporary issues, and two, the history of the United States. Thus the Board seems to believe that the history of their own country is the sole vehicle by which all students in Montgomery County public schools need encounter their "legal, moral, ethical, and cultural heritage."

What this restriction means is that a student can get a diploma from one of the nation's most prestigious public-school systems without studying any civilization east of the Atlantic Ocean or earlier than the sixteenth century. He is given a "cultural" heritage without Vergil or Dante, a "legal" heritage without Hammurabi, Solon, or Justinian, an "ethical" heritage without Moses, Socrates, Marcus Aurelius, or St. Paul. To call such a student "educated" is to tolerate, even to celebrate, a shallow and stifling provincialism.

Even so, the Montgomery County Board would presumably agree that religion is a "moral, ethical, and cultural" phenomenon in American history. It is therefore useful to examine what the county's history textbooks have to say about religion as historical fact.

According to the Montgomery County Program of Studies, students are to become acquainted with such things as the "major. . .social and political influences in the Colonial period." An emphasis such as this suggests strongly that religion--and intellectual history generally--will be extensively treated. To its authors' credit, the program also observes that: "By its nature, the content of social studies is subject to change and reinterpretation. Analyses and inquiries made by one scholar. . .are not necessarily the same as those made by others." In other words, the Board understands the specially exigent requirements of scholarship in the teaching of history. This understanding, coupled with the requirement to study "influences," "ideals," and "social forces," shows that the Board does not wish to enforce any particular orthodoxy. Even more important, the Program of Studies provides that its history courses should allow the student to escape from the constraints of contemporary opinion so as to understand the past on its own terms.

Montgomery County approves twenty textbooks, one anthology of sources, and one series of special studies of particular historical periods or problems for its required courses in the history of the United States. In all of these textbooks, the only extensive discussion of the influence of religion comes at the beginning, in the Colonial period.

There is a remarkable consensus to the effect that, after 1700, Christianity has no historical presence in America. This limited content of the textbooks imposes an unexpected limit on the inquiry. In dealing with textbook treatments of American history, it is possible to consider only one period, and no more.

Even within this period, the textbooks have some astonishing gaps. Some of them discuss Quakerism in Pennsylvania, but only one goes beyond the barest mention of the Roman Catholic Church's activities in Spain's American possessions. None discusses the role of Anglican Christianity in the middle and southern English colonies. Clarence Versteeg in American Spirit has a note on Jewish colonists, but it is as if Christian religious influences stopped at the border between Connecticut and New York.

Incompleteness, however, is only one issue. Incompetence is another, and a far more serious one. Factual error, slipshod interpretation, and anachronistic sloganeering are more dangerous to young minds than mere omission. Unfortunately,

all books but one must be judged incompetent under even the most rudimentary standards of historical scholarship. (That one exception is Nancy Bauer's The American Way, which though brief and superficial deals competently with religion in the colonial period.)

I shall begin with a particularly obvious example, in which the exact same mistake appears in three different textbooks: a picture of King James and the court hearing the public preaching at Paul's Cross. The captions of all three books describe the picture as representing "the type of elaborate ceremony the Puritans hoped to escape in the New World." (Davidson and Lytle, The United States) But in fact, public sermons were emphatically not the ceremonies which the Puritans wished to abolish, and certainly they did not escape from them in Massachusetts or Connecticut. From the caption the student learns that Puritans opposed ritual, which is true; but the picture which he sees is not a service of the church of England, so it cannot include those ceremonial features which the Puritans found repugnant. The use of the picture is an error. It is not picayune to expect exactitude on the part of a historical text. However correct the impression made, it results from a factual mistake, and the triple repetition of that mistake is triply damnable.

Less obvious, but even more serious, is the lack of balance and nuance in the books' accounts of Puritan ideas and Puritan institutions. Indeed, almost every reference to Puritanism is negative.

The books state generally that one of the chief reasons for emigration to the New World was freedom to worship as one pleased. And of course this is true, within limits. Asserting it and reasserting it without qualification and without explanation--particularly without explanation of the specifically Christian aspects of the settlement in every colony--leaves the student under a great misapprehension. He fails to grasp that colonization was a specifically Christian enterprise and that one of the stated purposes of colonization in every charter granted by the Crown was the propagation of the Gospel.

He does not even learn who these "Puritan settlers" were. Were all New Englanders "Puritans"? Or only the settlers of Massachusetts? Or, were the "Puritans" just a particular sect among many in the region?

Nor does the student ever get a coherent account of what "Puritanism" was as a coherent body of doctrine and worship. This is not surprising, since such an account would require some discussion of the Christian tradition inherited and modified by the Puritans, and these books are designed for schools which do not require their students to learn about any system of ideas more than a few hundred years old. Instead of any effort to develop the fundamental doctrines on which Massachusetts depended and by which she understood herself, the textbooks give us a picture of the oppressive government of the colony. For example, in America Is, by Frank Freidel and Henry N. Drewry, we read that the government of Massachusetts was in the hands of the "elite," a "small group of important Puritans." Now this statement is literally true, or so its objects believed, because the electorate of the Bay Colony at the time of the settlement was composed of the Church members who supposed themselves an elite in the strict French sense, elect of God out of the massa damnationis which

composes the human race. But the authors give no indication that they are using a foreign word in its original sense; and there is no reason why they should; and there is no reason, apart from charity, to believe that they do. "Rule by the elite," the Teacher's Edition remarks, "was still the order of the day." When, we may ask, has it not been?

Most of these books make no effort to make the student at all cognizant of the special character of the commonwealth which was established in Massachusetts. Only one--A People and a Nation, by Mary Beth Norton, David M. Katzman, Paul D. Escott, Howard P. Chudacoff, Thomas G. Paterson, and William M. Tuffle, Jr. (Boston, 1981) (which was ordered for consideration, but was not approved for use in the classroom)--gives anything like an account of the general covenant, the agreement with God to be his people and to abide by his laws which the people of Massachusetts believed they had made and on which they relied and which, in the truest sense, was their fundamental constitution. The covenant created their unique condition.

Massachusetts was by no means the only commonwealth in the world which believed itself to abide by the laws of God; it was hardly the only Christian commonwealth to do so. Rather the opposite: all the kingdoms and cities of Western Europe were Christian not only in population, but also in law. Not only was the Christian religion established--in the true sense of that word, commanded by law and supported by taxation--but their governments regarded themselves as political embodiments of the Church. In this, Massachusetts was no different from any other European country. Where it differed was in the peculiarly democratic character of its Christianity. Not that the government was democratic, though it was representative, nor that the Church could be subjected to popular vote, but the New England Way was democratic in that the whole people was publicly and repeatedly committed to its covenant with God, upon which its faith, its institutions, its prosperity, and its very existence, were deemed to rest. Any account of American history which attempts to distinguish it from the general run of European history and to describe its fundamental institutions--should at least attempt to explain the history of the Godly Commonwealth in terms of its own institutions and beliefs.

Since the word "federal" enters American thought to describe Massachusetts theology and the society based on it, it would seem necessary that a textbook at least mention the covenant. Yet none of the textbooks in use has done this, or even advised its readers that the whole foundation of government rested upon different principles then.

The books' discussions of the laws and customs which arose in this commonwealth are not only ignorant, but patronizing--and the more ignorant, the more patronizing. For example, Henry W. Bragdon and Samuel McCuthchen in The History of a Free People, tell their readers that according to the Puritans "toleration was a weakness inspired by the devil" and that one who favor d it must be "either an atheist or a heretic or a hypocrite or at best captive to some lust." Margaret Stimmann Branson says in America's Heritage that "because the Puritans wanted better to understand God's will they spent much time in their churches. They also looked for messages from heaven in thunderstorms, dreams, accidents or strange

happenings of any kind." The first of these statements has at least the merit of psychological truth, even though it fails to explain the implications of toleration in the Seventeenth Century. The second is merely indecent. It displays conspicuous and unpardonable ignorance, to say no more, in reducing the doctrine of special providence to the sound of thunder and devout seekers after the will of God to a pack of superstitious diviners. But what can we expect in a place where rule by the elite is still the custom?

History should attempt to show similarity and difference, change and continuity. These textbooks do not even attempt to do any such thing. Historical problems are treated with anachronism, discontinuity, and oversimplication. Anachronism appears most clearly in the description of the attitudes and beliefs of the past. The best example is that egregious remark about rule by the elite, but it runs much deeper through all of these textbooks, attributing to the past the attitudes, opinions, and prejudices of the present. The fallacy becomes even more pernicious when the people of the past used language identical to that of the present. Then the function of the historian is translation. His exposition should show how that language has changed its meaning, so that the reader will perceive at once both the change and the continuity. All of these authors seem to assume that men had the same attitudes in the early seventeenth century as now, but were merely less successful in implementing them. That prejudice underlies the patronizing remark (in This is America's Story) "strange though it may seem," Massachusetts did not permit general toleration. Obviously it was not strange to the men who governed the colony; if it had been, they would have acted otherwise. And, if it seems strange to us, then the historian had better explain it and not merely sneer at it.

Discontinuity is the second main failing of these textbooks. It is demonstrated by their repeated references to "the Puritans" without any attempt at explaining who these people were, where they came from, and, most important, where they have gone. That remarkably impertinent quotation from America's Heritage about the quest for omens exemplifies this tendency, which equally with anachronism tends to stultify understanding and to cut the student off from the past. Why does none of these textbooks explain that the churches which the Puritans founded still exist--often in the buildings they built for them--today? Both the anachronism and the discontinuity foster a snide sort of "that-was-then-this-is-now" attitude toward the past which is unbecoming, to say the least, and extremely damaging to a true understanding and appreciation of the past. There is no point to an account of history which is written as if the past were at one and the same time untouchably remote and yet subject to the strictures of modern prejudice. Far from teaching history, such an attitude does the reverse and effectively isolates the student from his past by inducing in him the smug, blanket-wrapped assurance of his own superiority to his forbears.

Finally, these books exhibit gross oversimplification--not just in the quotations cited above, but far more often by departing so little from vague generalities that it is impossible even to dig out something specific to criticize. There is much less value in such an approach to history even than in old-fashioned names-and-dates textbooks, which at least provided the student with data if not with interpretation. These provide neither. Particularly guilty of vagueness and inanity are The New Exploring

American History by Melvin Schwartz and John R. O'Connor, its successor, Exploring Our Country's History, by Sidney Schwartz and John R. O'Connor, Adventures in American History, by Jay Glanzrock, and Freedom's Trail by Richard A. Bartlett et al.

The result of these three failings is that these textbooks invite their readers to an extremely unpleasant kind of complicity. Reading almost any of them, the student is drawn into a kind of conspiracy with the authors against the past. These textboks exhibit a sense of it-was-this-way-then-but-we-know-better-now which is highly offensive to anyone who takes history seriously.

The student who reads these books, marks them, learns them, and inwardly digests them, will leave with no heightened understanding of his heritage, but instead with a complacent contempt for it. With a knowing wink, the textbooks draw him to despise the past, and to mock it, as they mock it. Adolescents love to scoff at their elders; these books invite them to indulge themselves.

The treatment of Roger Williams further exemplifies the fallacies of these textbooks. Roger Williams is a very important figure in American history. His achievement in Rhode Island was the forerunner of the religious settlement which prevails throughout the United States. The student should certainly understand it; in the language of the Board of Education, it constitutes a major article of our heritage with which everyone should be familiar. All these textbooks, without exception, miss the chance to teach the lesson which the clash between Williams and John Winthrop of Massachusetts provides--the contrast between two opposite notions of society, both equally derived from Christian principles, but one assuming that the community must make one whole body, and the other rejecting that notion. America has come to embrace the latter view and to glorify it; it would be well if she would also try to understand it.

Missing the opportunity to explain the true differences between Williams and Winthrop, the authors take the route of picturing Williams in his own terms as the Martyr of Massachusetts. (A History of Our American Republic is noteworthy for this.) This is bad enough, but the textbooks compound mere superficiality with outright error by depicting Williams primarily as one who wanted to worship as he pleased. Margaret Stimmann Branson, indeed (it is hardly surprising that it should be she) explains that he believed that "the Church should mind its own business," but she does not explain what he believed the Church's business to be, nor, of course, what its business was believed to be in Massachusetts. Then she adds inaccuracy to inadequacy by commenting that Thomas Hooker, one of the two foremost Calvinist clergymen in America, led a group of settlers to Connecticut to "worship in their own way," without the slightest hint of an explanation that their own way was the New England Way, exactly the same as in Massachusetts. All of this is partly misleading, partly insufficient, and partly wrong; nothing more need be said. But what is interesting about these comments on Williams is not only the absence of any exposition of, or critical comment upon, his ideas, but the idealization of the man himself. He becomes the Hero in Flight from Persecution. It is hardly necessary to make Williams into this kind of caricature, a sort of Li'l Abner-with-the-Bible. He is important enough, not only in American history, but in Western history generally, as

one of the originators of the notion of toleration, not to need this kind of portrait. The ordinary high school student, however, will encounter only the name and not the work the man performed.

Consider also the story of Anne Hutchinson, the Boston prophetess. This woman caused an uproar in Massachusetts in the mid-1630's when she appeared to be teaching that the truly elect were guided by an inner light, and need be subject to no law whatsoever. In 1638, she was subjected to trial as a contumacious heretic, condemned and exiled from the colony. So much for Mrs. Hutchinson. Yet for some reason, she is made much of, and all the books mention her at some length. Granted that she greatly disturbed Massachusetts for a few years at the very inception of its history, and that her reliance upon John Cotton permanently damaged the reputation of the colony's most eminent divine; still her activity does not seem to merit so much attention, especially in the light of the omission of numerous more important matters, like the halfway covenant, King Philip's War, and the revocation of the charter in 1682, or the scant mention of such other important matters as the Salem witchcraft scare, which went on for as long as Mrs. Hutchinson's public notoriety and disturbed the colony quite as much, and the Great Awakening.

But the errors come even grosser than this. In his account of the career of Anne Hutchinson in A Proud Nation, p. 99, Ernest R. May says "Governor Winthrop thought this kind of teaching would lead to a breakdown in government. He was partly right. Hutchinson's followers were strong enough to defeat Winthrop in an election in 1636. So when he was re-elected governor in 1638, he held a trial and banished Mrs. Hutchinson for treason" (emphasis supplied).

The implication of that "so", that because Winthrop was defeated by Mrs. Hutchinson's friends, he hounded her into exile, as if he had been the Nixon of New England, constitutes abuse of the evidence, the worst crime, apart from negligence, with which a historian can be charged. The business of Anne Hutchinson and the antinomian controversy is trivial enough in all conscience without having it trivialized further into a personal vendetta on the part of John Winthrop. Equally A People and a Nation trivializes the issue, in a different direction; and that is particularly regrettable because this book, not approved for use, unquestionably would have been the best history textbook available in Montgomery County. Even its authors, however, allow themselves to be drawn into an even worse abuse than does Mr. May when they say that Anne Hutchinson was prosecuted chiefly because she was a woman, and in evidence quote the process as saying that she had striven to be a husband rather than a wife, a preacher rather than a hearer, and a magistrate rather than a subject, listing three places in which the woman had erred, only one of which is related to her sex. This kind of abuse of the evidence, to which the story of Anne Hutchinson is particularly prone, is the worst sin which any historian can commit. Mrs. Hutchinson's very presence in textbooks which omit mention of names like Increase Mather and John Eliot seems an abuse of the evidence. It sharpens the question: Just why are these books as bad as they are?

One answer pretty clearly has to be ignorance. The people who have written these books have not known what they were writing about, or, where they have known, have not cared to trouble over accuracy. The picture of the sermon

demonstrates that. Its simultaneous appearance in three separate textbooks suggests that it lies in some archive and anybody who says, Church of England--Seventeenth Century, can get hold of it. It is included in these books as an example of the here's-a-pretty-picture-let's-print-it school of historiography. Nothing but ignorance could have given rise to most of the errors of fact in these textbooks.

The fallacies arise from other causes. The oversimplification in particular, and more generally the pervasive anachronism, of these books derives from a patronizing deference to the limited capacity of a high school student's mind. Instead of attempting to expand the intellect by introducing it to new ideas, these textbooks--and this we have seen abundantly often--refuse to introduce any ideas at all. The same kind of patronizing oversimplification recurs again and again. As clear an example of this contempt for the student as any can be found in From Sea to Shining Sea, by Bernard Weissberger, where the word "theocracy" is introduced in text, only to be defined as "rule by the religious leaders." "Theocracy," of course, means either government by a person revered as a god, or in accordance with a divine commission. Since the settlers of Massachusetts believed that it was inconsistent with the dignity of the ministers that they should hold public office, the clergy did not sit in the General Court. What the author means is that the clergy had a great influence over public policy. He either knows, or should know, that that is what he means. If he knows it, why does he say something else? If not, why does he presume to say anything at all?

Besides ignorance, another possible explanation of this extraordinarily cavalier treatment of historical fact is that the authors are not especially interested in historical fact per se. What they want the textbook to create for the student is not an accurate account of the past, but a mere impression which will be consistent with their own beliefs. Historical persons and places, names, dates (though very few of these), and events are used to inculcate the proper notion of the past. This proper notion is, of course, the interpretation of history from which the authors are proceeding. The result of using their textbooks would be that, whether the student is acquainted with historical facts or not, he is acquainted with history -- or, it might be better to say, with History. He will understand how the past has resulted in the present, even though he has been made only barely conversant with the past itself. The figures of the past and their doings and beliefs are used almost like cartoon characters. Better yet, if the word "myth" be understood in its most technical sense, as a story by which the world around us is interpreted, then, in that sense, high-school textbook history is myth. American history is presented to the student as the appearance of certain recognized phenomena--to choose a few from the Montgomery County Program of Studies--such as the American Revolution, the development of egalitarian and democratic institutions, and the rise of abolition, each of which in its turn resulted in a society slightly more like that of the present day. Men and events are treated only as they conduced to the appearance of these phenomena or resisted them.

Even more than the nebulous notion of myth, a comparison with the doctrine of iconoduly will illuminate the point I am trying to make. A holy image is not intended to be a portrait of a saint or an accurate representation of an event like the Nativity or the Crucifixion. The icon is a symbol through which the believer may perceive a

concrete manifestation of the glory of God. The saint or mystery represented by the icon was itself an example of divine glory appearing to men, and the icon is deliberately intended to abstract from the merely particular and historical and return the beholder's perception to the unchanged and identical glory which is expressed by each separate manifestation. These textbooks do likewise: an historical figure or event is selected to represent a certain idea which the authors wish to emphasize as essential to American society. Then, without regard to the special individual characteristics of the chosen subjects (often in spite of them) that subject, whether man, woman, voyage of discovery, war, foundation, or enactment of a law, is held up as the symbol which underscores that essential idea. Thus Anne Hutchinson is an icon of Freedom of Thought. Thus Thomas Hooker is an icon of Toleration--who is said to have fled to Connecticut for exactly the same reason that Roger Williams fled to Rhode Island. The gross errors of fact and misapplications of data in these books are all in the service of an organizing principle which might be called "Symbolic Interpretation," whereby historical facts and pseudo-facts appear as the archetypes of ideas and movements.

Nowhere, of course, does any of these textbooks explicity state this principle of interpretation. Yet it is the only one which allows these books, except for The American Way, by Nancy Bauer, to speak with a clear and comprehensible voice. And we may not quarrel with a principle of interpretation, unless we may impeach it on the ground of its results.

But this principle may indeed be impeached on the ground of its results. In the first place, however useful such a principle of interpretation may be in teaching high school students some skeletal knowledge of more recent American social and political beliefs, what results from using it in these textbooks can hardly be called "history." The Christian who venerates an image knows that the image is not a photographic likeness, but a representation of a theological premise. The high school student does not know that what his textbook presents as historical facts is actually a series of secular icons. Look back over the titles of these textbooks: they purport to be A History of the Republic, American History, The History of a Free People. From what the student has been given, he has no reason to believe that these textbooks are other, or less, than "history." But no matter how charitably we are willing to judge these textbooks, we must conclude that "history" is the one thing they are not.

Quite apart from this consideration, important though it is, the particular interpretations which result from this principle do not hold up. In the cases which we discussed, we saw how the authors used superficiality and omission to create a caricature where, by a more careful and more substantial presentation they might have obtained a full picture of the genesis and descent of our special institutions and beliefs. Even if we could swallow the unhistorical character of this self-styled "history," the jejune and self-indulgent interpretation which is all the textbooks can offer would serve to condemn them as incompetent.

That interpretation, or rather caricature, may be stated in one sentence. These textbooks are written to propound the thesis that America was settled for the sake of religious freedom, and that religious freedom means the absence of religion. In keeping with their historiographical principle that religion has little or no real

importance, the textbooks abandon all discussion of it after they finish with the seventeenth century. Once the settlement has been effected, and the population has escaped from the trammels of religion, religion need not be mentioned again. There are exceptions to this general rule, but they are so sporadic as to be incapable of conveying anything like the true importance of religion in America before the twentieth century--and even during the twentieth century. The resulting gaps in American intellectual and moral life--to say nothing of daily life--are extraordinary.

It would be interesting to discuss these omissions in detail, but a really thorough discussion would require me to produce my own textbook. Let me instead mention some of the events and tendencies in American history which have exhibited the influence of Christianity.

o First and no doubt most important of all is the Great Awakening of the mid-eighteenth century. The Awakening was the most important event in American intellectual history between the Discovery and the Revolution. The notion of "conversion" which became prevalent at that time engendered the individualistic and sectarian type of religion which has ever since been characteristic of American Protestantism. The new emphasis on personal spiritual enlightenment helped make America's churches forever more democratic than their Old World counterparts. In turn, those ecclesiastical developments had profound influences on the way our ancestors organized other social institutions, like governments. But only two of these textbooks, People and Our Country, and American History by John A. Garraty, even mention the Great Awakening. Only the former of these finds it necessary in doing so to speak of Jonathan Edwards.

o Having neglected the Great Awakening, the authors find it easy to neglect the prominent part the churches played during the war for American independence. Yet the British referred to the American clergy as the "Black Regiment" of the Continental Army, and there has always been current in Britain the belief that 1776 was the Puritans' revenge for 1662. No doubt that latter interpretation is too extreme, but it does show more appreciation than any of these textbooks do of the importance of the political sermon and the clerical polemic during the Revolutionary period.

o After the Revolution, the era of the great revivals began, continuing the spiritual movement launched during the Great Awakening. Like the Awakening, the revivals promoted the democratic and egalitarian ideas which anyone interested in American history will wish to investigate--as, indeed, the Program of Studies of the Montgomery County Public Schools demands.

o Furthermore, the movement for the abolition of slavery gained impetus during the first half of the nineteenth century largely because of the sponsorship of Quaker and Protestant leaders. But there is no mention in any of these books of the part religion played in abolitionist theory and practice--even though the Montgomery County Program of Studies states that students should be able to "identify incidents which served to polarize northern and southern attitudes on the extension of slavery."

o At the same time that Abolition was rising in growing, in strength, the nativist or Know-Nothing movement was agitating against the first great wave of Catholic immigration. Mid-nineteenth century anti-Catholicism played a vital role in the successful movement for a monopolistic public school system.

o After the war, the same religious forces which had promoted Abolition began to forward the movement for women's suffrage and temperance. But you would never guess that from any of these textbooks.

o These few notes only take the Quaker and Protestant influences on American social, political, and intellectual life up to the end of the nineteenth century. The period of greatest Roman Catholic influence was then only beginning; but the influences of the social teachings of Leo XIII on the American labor movement and ultimately, on the Democratic Party, in the mid-twentieth century should not be neglected. Yet the vast majority of these textbooks make nothing of any of these developments. Todd and Curti, in The Rise of the American Nation, mention the Know-Nothings; later they mention Mother Cabrini as an example of Roman Catholic social action. None of the textbooks sees fit to mention Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement. In the same way Bragdon and McCutchen, in The History of a Free People mention Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel, though they never mention the less specific but more pervasive influence of Protestantism on the temperance, suffragist, and other "reform" movements.

o Finally, the late nineteenth century was the great age of immigration to America, and the time when the non-Christian population first became significant. But the persecution of Chinese and Japanese Buddhists is one of the great untold stories in American history. It remains untold in these textbooks.

The only consistent explanation for all these omissions is that there really is a historiographical principle lying underneath these textbooks. Religion is taken to be negligible in American history. To the extent that it has had any influence, that influence is negative. America was settled by people seeking religious freedom; when they had found it, obviously, religion ceased to have any influence, because the settlers had escaped from it. This is exactly the same picture that the textbooks have already drawn with such broad strokes in their accounts of colonial America; their subsequent silence on nearly all later religious phenomena is not surprising.

We began by considering history textbooks for their treatment of one particular aspect of history. Because of the limitations of the textbooks themselves, the survey assumed an even more particular character. We have come to the end of a survey which was by nature limited and special. Yet now it is only fair to draw back and to consider these works in more general terms. Granted that these textbooks are indeed unsatisfactory, in the narrow terms of the inquiry, are their deficiencies great enough to justify condemning them outright?

The answer is "Yes." Because these books are so completely deficient in explaining the influence of religion in American history, they show themselves to be deficient in teaching history. We cannot understand the settlement of the American colonies without considering it as a Christian undertaking. Likewise, we cannot

understand the colonists except as Christians, not just because they were in fact Christians, but also because their religion was the fundamental condition of their understanding of themselves and of the world they lived in. What is true of the American colonists is true, mutatis mutandis, of everybody else in American history, or, for that matter, in any history. Given the oportunity to review only one aspect of these textbooks, that reason made it best for us to choose religion. It is not possible to understand a society or its members without knowing how that society understood itself. On that point, these textbooks show themselves deficient; it is because they are deficient in conception that they are deficient in detail.

Far from attempting to understand and explain the beliefs of the past, these textbooks make no effort to transcend the confines of the glibly assumed opinions of their authors. They present the past, not on its own terms, but on the terms of the present. Historical interpretation is a form of translation--not from one language to another but from one time to another--and equally open to the dangers of false cognates and false equivalences. Such abuses abound in these texts. It suffices only to mention one or two again. The notion of "the elite"--unnecessarily borrowed from the language of sociology--can hardly be expected to explain the limited franchise in Massachusetts. Neither will the distortions applied to Mrs. Hutchinson explain her. It was not because she was a threat to John Winthrop's re-election, nor yet because she was an incipient feminist, that she was tried, but because she was claiming a direct and immediate revelation from God. Such misrepresentations as these limit and stultify the understanding of the present by denying the possibility of other opinions than our own, and at the same time rob the past of its integrity by making hypocrites of all its characters. Neither the study of history--that great and unending endeavor--nor the more utilitarian purposes of the Montgomery County Program of Studies are served by these textbooks. They are superficial both in their exposition of past events and in their uncritical acceptance of present-day shibboleths. They present an equal contempt for the convictions of the past and the capacities of the present.

Bad as is the contempt for other people's minds which these textbooks exhibit, their contempt for historical evidence is far worse. Unremitting attention to evidentiary fact is the foundation of the liberal arts. When that is taken away, so that the facts themselves are no longer trustworthy, scholarship degenerates into mere propaganda. That is what these authors have made of their books, so that it is in them truly, far more than in all the pages of Spengler, that "one has brought home to one the twilight of the West." (It would, of course, be beautifully illustrated with a photograph of sunset over a belltower captioned, "Gothic cathedral at evening.") These books have to be condemned, not only because they slight the influence of religion in American history, but because they neglect, deny, and distort the evidence. That, in a historian, is a crime equivalent to poisoning a well.

The majority of these books do not honestly attempt to teach students enough to satisfy even the requirements of the Montgomery County Program of Studies. Call themselves what they will, they are not histories of anything except the current banalities of which they themselves are evidence. Finally, it is only honesty that matters. This is the only principle acceptable to liberal scholarship: No fact may be ignored or omitted to fit a thesis. In The Search, C.P. Snow's novel about scientific

inquiry, one character says to another, "The truth has to be told all the time." What condemns these textbooks at last is not their banality or even their superficiality, obnoxious as those are. What condemns them is their negligence of the fundamental fact. Any interpretation the authors wish to make, they are free to make--so long as they respect the historical fact. That is what these textbooks and their authors have failed to do; and, because they have failed to respect the incorrigible fact, their authors have forfeited for themselves any claim to respect, or to the name of scholar.

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